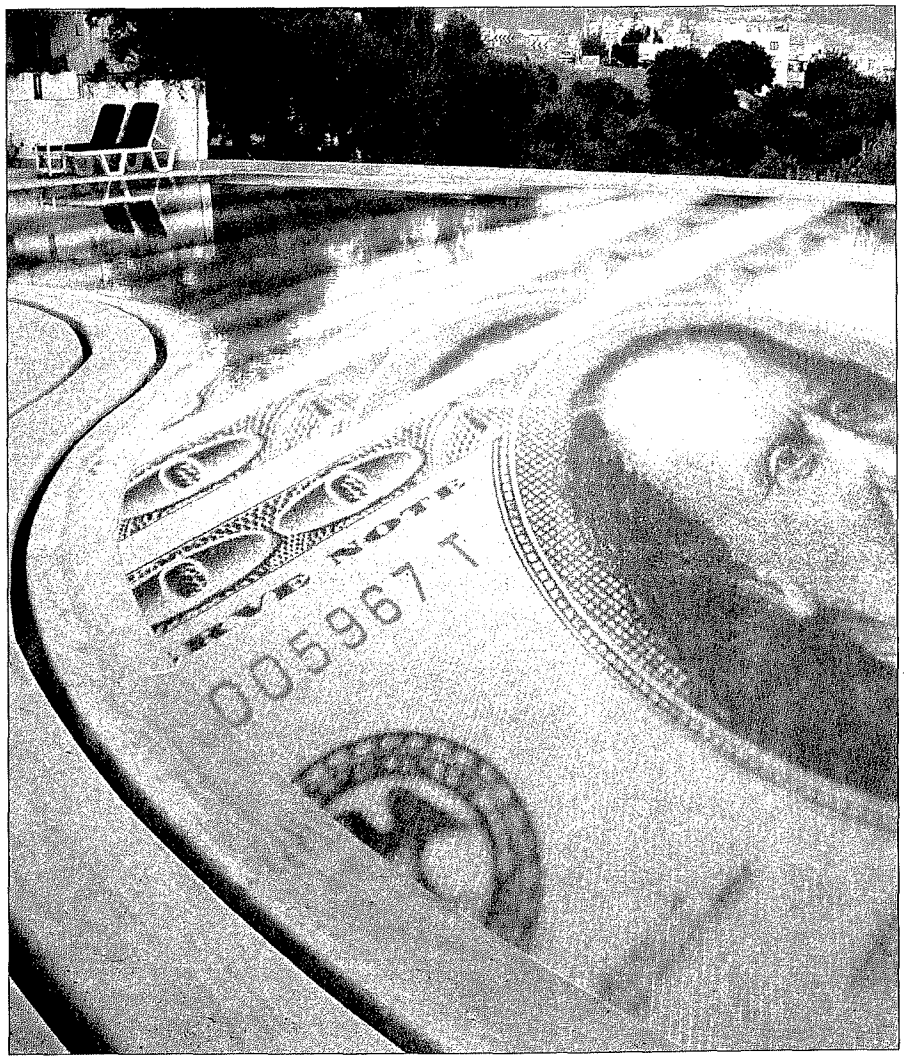
Automatic Cleaner Rebates Considered in California

By Rebecca Robledo Pacific Gas and Electric may begin offering rebates for certain automatic cleaners.

The San Francisco-based utility currently is testing various models of robotic, suction-side, pressure-side and booster-pump cleaners to check for the products' energy efficiency. In-floor cleaners are not part of the initiative because officials are unable to establish a testing method for them.

"PG&E has determined that there's a significant energy-saving opportunity associated with certain types of automatic pool cleaners," said Gary Fernstrom, a staff augmentation employee at PG&E. Fernstrom has spearheaded advocacy efforts for energy efficiency in pools and spas.



This effort, in part, addresses a concern springing from Title 20, a state code mandating energy-efficient pool pumps.

"One of the biggest objections from the trade about [Title 20] is, 'If you pump at low speed, my pool cleaner doesn't work,'" Fernstrom said. "So ... what could we do to improve pool-cleaner efficiency or recognize those products that were inherently more efficient that might help alleviate this concern? Are there some products on the market that do a better job at 20-, 25- and 30 gallons per minute, which is reduced from what might be the typical 50-, 60 or 70 gallons per minute?"

By mid-March, the testing had just been set up and included eight to 10 cleaner models. Researchers will determine how many square feet of floor space each cleaner can cover in a set amount of time. They will then factor energy usage to determine each model's efficiency.

"If we divide the area cleaned by the energy input, we get a figure of energy efficiency merit for the cleaner, as if to say, 'How much pool can you clean for how little energy?'" Fernstrom said. "The goal is to find and perhaps reward through rebates the cleaners that use the least energy for the equivalent area of the bottom of the pool cleaned."

Testing should be completed by the beginning of May, according to Fernstrom. Shortly thereafter, the utility will decide whether or not the products merit a rebate program — and if PG&E's budget will allow it. If so, it should be in place by the beginning of 2010.